



File Code: 1950
Date: May 21, 2021

Dear Interested Parties and Stakeholders:

The Grindstone Ranger District of the Mendocino National Forest is initiating National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for the Cold Springs Salvage Project. The project area includes portions of the Smokey Project that was in progress when the 2020 August Complex Fire burned.

The Cold Springs Salvage Project is located entirely within the Grindstone Ranger District and is in the vicinity of Smith Camp, which is southwest of Paskenta, California and northwest of Elk Creek (see map). The project area is approximately 243 acres. More detailed information regarding the proposed action for the project is outlined below.

Background

The Decision Notice for the original Smokey Project was signed in 2012. The intent of the project was to reduce high stand density to protect and to enhance wildlife habitat, in particular for the northern spotted owl (NSO). The Smokey Project produced one timber sale, which was being implemented at the time of the 2020 August Complex. The August Complex burned a total of 1,032,648 acres, including 612,634 acres on the MNF. The entire Smokey Project footprint was within the fire perimeter. Increase in fire activity pushed the fire through the untreated, late-seral reserve (LSR) portion of the project, and into recently treated and pending thinning units. The fire caused nearly complete mortality of residual trees within these units.

Implementation of the Smokey Project stopped by the August Complex included harvesting within the timber sale, resulting in loss for the local economy. Due to the economic loss, the Smokey Project does not fulfill an original purpose "to provide a sustained yield of timber and other wood products to help support local economies and to contribute to meeting local, regional and national needs" [Smokey Project Decision Notice (DN) pg. 2 and Mendocino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), pg. IV-3]

A Rapid Assessment Team of specialists analyzed the effects of fire and made recommendations for post-fire recovery. They determined that the high mortality would lead to heavy accumulation of fuels, thus making the remaining NSO habitat more vulnerable to future fires.

Purpose and Need for Action

Within the first year following a fire, economic value decreases as trees begin to deteriorate. Accelerated wood decay of fire-affected trees necessitates prompt action to ensure harvested trees retain sufficient merchantable value to facilitate a timber sale and support restoration activities and fuel load reductions. Material provided by MNF supports a viable local timber



industry and wood products infrastructure, including a local mill. A viable timber industry and wood products infrastructure provides long-term local employment while improving the MNF's ability to treat and manage forest vegetation in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

The proposed harvest falls within matrix land, specifically the timber modified management prescription (Rx 7). This prescription provides emphasis on the timber production while providing for other resource objectives (LRMP pg. IV-69). The proposed project also helps to meet the forest goals of providing a sustained yield of timber and other wood products to help support local economies (LRMP pg. IV-3) and of maintaining the quality of habitat needed to support viable populations of native wildlife species such as NSO (LRMP, pg. IV-4).

There is a need to expeditiously recover timber killed by the August Complex Fire. The salvaged timber would help off-set lost volume and recover lost value for the timber industry due to the August Complex Fire. Reforestation would help provide a sustained yield of timber over time.

Proposed Action

General actions proposed include:

- Salvage merchantable timber; retain trees that are most likely to survive.
- Utilize available slash as surface cover (70% ground cover) to protect soil from erosion and to enrich with organic matter.
- Reduce fuel accumulation to no more than 10 tons/acre by removing merchantable timber and biomass and by burning of slash piles.
- Provide for wildlife habitat by retaining a minimum of 4 snags and 4 large downed logs per acre.
- Accelerate return of forested conditions by planting a mix of appropriate species.
- Provide for workers' safety by removing hazard trees along utilized roads within the project area.

To meet the purpose and need of the project, the following activities are proposed:

Salvage

Salvage fire-killed and severely injured trees using ground-based equipment. Chainsaws and/or mechanical harvesters (tracked and/or rubber-tired equipment) would be used to fall commercial-sized fire-killed and damaged trees on slopes generally up to 35 percent. In general, trees would be limbed and bucked into log segments prior to being yarded to the landing. Whole tree yarding might be used once effective post-harvest soil cover reaches minimum 50 percent.

Trees that are subject to salvage include fire-killed trees that either (1) have no green needles or (2) meet the criteria of a 0.7 Probability of Mortality (Pm) in the Mortality guidelines, based on *Marking Guidelines for Fire-Injured Trees in California*, Report # RO-11-01 (Smith and Cluck 2011). Commercial size considered for this project includes trees greater than 12 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH). Diameter specifications may change at the time of implementation due to progressing timber deterioration, and market requirements.

Small diameter trees (3-11.9 inches DBH) that meet mortality guidelines, may also be utilized to meet surface cover requirements through lopping and scattering or chipping. Excess could be piled and burned or decked for removal as biomass.

Replanting

Replant salvaged units with species commonly found in the area, including ponderosa pine, sugar pine and Douglas-fir. On sites capable of supporting these species, special consideration would be given to incense cedar and red fir. Planting should occur in irregular pattern (spot planting with microsite utilization) and at lower densities. On sites where sprouting white oak and/or black oak are present, planting will not take place. Continue monitoring reforestation efforts until seedlings are deemed free to grow. Release and thin planted seedlings and natural regeneration until desired species composition, tree densities, and spacing pattern supporting management objectives are reached.

All interested persons, organizations, and agencies; state and local governments; and tribal governments are encouraged to participate. The Forest Service would like to receive comments specific to meeting the purpose and need of this proposal. Comments should be submitted by **Friday, June 11, 2021** to be considered in the development and analysis of this project. Comments received in response to this notice, including names and addresses of respondents, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Please submit your written comments to:

Mendocino National Forest
825 N. Humboldt Ave.
Willows, CA 95988

Or by e-mail to:

comments-pacificsouthwest-mendocino-grindstone@usda.gov
(with a subject line of Cold Springs).

Information on the project is available through the MNF project webpage at: https://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/project_list.php?forest=110508. If you have questions about this proposal, please contact Radek Glebocki, Silviculturist, at radoslaw.glebocki@usda.gov or 530-934-1215.

Sincerely,



LOREN EVEREST
District Ranger

Attachment: Map

